

SYSTEM, METHOD AND SOFTWARE APPLICATION FOR ACCESSING AND PROCESSING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to a system, method and software application for storing, retrieving, and displaying information. More particularly, the present invention relates to a system, method and software application which allows for the interactive storage, retrieval, and display of agent identifying information and agent commission information. The present invention allows users to more easily and conveniently access and verify agent identifying information and agent commission information.

Insurance companies generally offer a wide variety of insurance and financial plans suited for various types of individuals and circumstances. To offer and manage these plans, insurance companies generally rely on great numbers of agents and insurance agents (hereafter collectively referred to as "agents") to sell and issue insurance policies to individual policy holders on their behalf. Each insurance company authorizes its agents to write policies on its behalf by way of an appointment.

Generally, an appointment is a legal authorization which allows an agent to act on behalf of an appointing insurance company and to enter into specific agreements with policy holders on its behalf. Generally, each agent is appointed for a given time, within a given state, with the authority to sell a particular set of products. Commonly, a single appointed agent can be responsible for creating millions of dollars in financial obligations for an appointing insurance company.

To assist in tracking each of their agents, appointing companies generally use a variety of agent identifying information. This agent identifying information generally includes assigned writing codes or other identifying numbers such as birth dates, social security numbers and the like. Additionally, agent identifying information may include other information such as an agent's name, address, telephone number and the like.

Insurance agents are generally paid commissions based upon the various terms and conditions of the policies they write and the commission schedules in their sales contracts. Among the pieces of information which may effect the payment and the amount of a commission are: the estimated commission
5 processing date, which determines when a commission becomes payable; the face amount of policy written; the premium paid for the policy; the category or mode of the premium; the issue age of the policy; and the split percentage of the commission, if any. Each of these factors are generally combined by insurance companies to establish a gross commissionable amount which is multiplied by a
10 specific commission rate agreed upon by the agent and the insurance company. By multiplying the gross commissionable amount by the commission rate, insurance companies and their agents generally determine a gross commission which is payable to the soliciting agent. Collectively, each piece of information used to derive an agent's commission may be included in the term agent
15 commission information.

Presently, insurance companies track agent commission information and agent identifying information by maintaining and updating a set of paper files with the support of a computerized database system. Generally, direct access to information on this system is limited to administrators directly responsible for
20 updating and maintaining these records. When updates are required, generally the responsible administrators make all of the necessary changes manually and then generate a letter or a phone call to the affected agent confirming the change. When the agent wishes to make a change or obtain information, the agent is responsible for calling or writing the insurance company to effect the change and
25 the company, through its administrators, then updates its files accordingly.

As may be apparent, the present system for tracking agent identifying information and agent commission information has several drawbacks which makes it inadequate to manage large numbers of agents. First, the present system requires large numbers of people to oversee and manage the files and information
30 for each agent. This makes the present system very expensive and burdensome on

appointing companies. Secondly, even when the present system is properly staffed and maintained, the system still requires frequent contact between the appointing company and its agents. Thirdly, even with frequent contact, the present system is highly paper intensive and requires both the agent and their appointing companies to independently maintain and track agent identifying information and agent commission information. This results in the present system being very prone to human error and communication breakdowns.

Accordingly, there is a strong need in the insurance industry for a system which reduces the time and effort required to manage agent identifying information and agent commission information. Additionally, there is a strong need for a system which allows individual agents to easily access their agent identifying information and agent commission information.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention overcomes the problems noted above and provides additional advantages, by providing a system, method and software application which enables users to interactively store, retrieve, and display agent identifying information and agent commission information.

According to the present invention, agent identifying information and agent commission information are able to be accessed and displayed so that remote users can manage and track agents and their commission generating activities. Additionally, both agents and their appointing companies may access and display the status of agents and their commission generating activities in near real time.

Additionally, the present invention also provides various other options to users such as: access to selected forms and various printing and reporting options. By providing the above described features in a comprehensive, user friendly manner, the present invention optimizes the efficiency of the entire agent and commission tracking processes.

Additional advantages of the present invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The advantages of the invention may be realized and attained by means of instrumentalities and combinations,
5 particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

To achieve the advantages and in accordance with the purpose of the invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, in its broadest aspects, the present invention relates to providing an interactive tool for storing, retrieving, and displaying agent identifying information and agent commission information.
10 The method of the present invention comprises the steps of: receiving agent identifying information and agent commission information; analyzing and sorting the received agent identifying information and agent commission information; saving the agent identifying information and the agent commission information; providing an interactive display of the agent identifying information and the agent
15 commission information; providing interactive access to a display of detailed agent identifying information; and providing interactive access to a display of detailed agent commission information.

In another aspect, the invention comprises a computer readable medium including a software application for enabling interactive access to agent
20 identifying information and agent commission information. The software application comprises: one or more instructions for receiving agent identifying information and agent commission information; one or more instructions for analyzing and sorting the received agent identifying information and agent commission information; one or more instructions for saving the agent identifying
25 information and the agent commission information; one or more instructions for providing an interactive display of the agent identifying information and the agent commission information; one or more instructions for providing interactive access to a display of detailed agent identifying information; and one or more instructions for providing interactive access to a display of detailed agent
30 commission information.

In yet another aspect, the present invention comprises a server system for providing access to agent identifying information and agent commission information, wherein the system comprises: a receiving element for receiving agent identifying information and agent commission information; a processing
5 element for analyzing and sorting the received agent identifying information and agent commission information; a saving element for saving the agent identifying information and the agent commission information; a displaying element for providing an interactive display of the agent identifying information and the agent commission information; a first interface element for providing interactive access
10 to a display of detailed agent identifying information; and a second interface element for providing interactive access to a display of detailed agent commission information.

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, together with the description, serve to further explain
15 the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention can be understood more completely by reading the following Detailed Description of exemplary embodiments, in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

20 Figure 1 is a simplified schematic representation illustrating one example of a computer network configuration for use with one embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a flowchart illustrating the steps in a preferred method for providing access to agent identifying information and agent commission
25 information;

Figure 3 is a preferred embodiment of one example of a proposed interactive display for providing interactive access to agent identifying information and agent commission information;

Figure 4 is a preferred embodiment of a proposed agent data screen for providing interactive access to agent identifying information and agent commission information;

Figure 5 is a preferred embodiment of an agent commission detail data screen for providing interactive access to agent commission information;

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Reference will now be made in detail to the present preferred embodiment of the invention, an example of which is illustrated in the accompanying drawings in which like reference characters refer to corresponding elements.

The system, method, and software application of the present invention described below, are preferably implemented by an interactive computer software application incorporated within a computer-readable medium such as a hard disk drive, an optical medium such as a compact disk, or the like. Further, the computer-readable medium may be available to a user either locally on the user's computer or remotely over a computer network, such as a local area network (LAN) or through the Internet. The inventive computer software application is designed to receive agent identifying information and agent commission information. The software application then analyzes the agent identifying information and agent commission information and stores it in a convenient, easily accessible and useful manner. Once stored, access to the agent identifying information and agent commission information is preferably provided through an interactive display such through an Internet or an intranet web page.

Figure 1 illustrates an example network arrangement 18 employing the method and system of the present invention in accordance with a preferred embodiment. It should be understood that the present invention operates independent of any particular arrangement or mix of network components and that the network arrangement 18 depicted in Figure 1 is purely illustrative and simplified for the purpose of explanation.

As shown in Figure 1, the example network arrangement 18 comprises an application server 20, a database server 22, a network terminal 7, and a plurality of remote terminals 24, 28, and 30. The application server 20 may be any network, Internet, or enterprise server capable of hosting or supporting Internet and/or network access. According to a preferred embodiment, the application server 20 is run using software such as a Netscape Enterprise Server 3.6.2TM application and a Sun Solaris 2.6TM application. Alternatively, any network operating system and server software may be used. For instance, the present invention may use programs and operating system applications such as, for example, a Windows 95TM operating system application, a Windows 98TM operating system application, a Windows 2000TM operating system application, a Windows NTTM operating system application, a MacIntoshTM operating system application, a UnixTM operating system application, an OS/2TM operating system application, and a NetWareTM operating system application.

As shown, the application server 20 includes a processor module 34 and a memory module 11. The database server 22 includes a database program 12. According to a preferred embodiment, the database server 22 and the database program 12 are preferably run using OracleTM compatible programs. Within the scope of the present invention, however, the database server 22 may comprise any software that allows for the management of data structured as fields or records, and that is managed by a database management system (DBMS) such as relational databases produced by, for example, JavaTM, SybaseTM, MicrosoftTM and InformixTM.

The application server 20 may gain access to the database server 22 via a link 38 and access to a network terminal 7 via a network link 42. Additionally, the application server 20, using an Internet connection 40, may communicate with the remote terminal 24 via a connection device 32 and with the remote terminals 28 and 30 via a network server 26 of a LAN network 36. In accordance with the present invention, the connection device 32 may be any device for connecting remote computers or terminals to other computing devices or networks. For

instance, the connection device 32 may be a wireless modem, a cable modem or a DSL modem or other means. The network server 26 connects and communicates with the remote terminals 28 and 30 via a link 50 and a link 50a and a link 50b, respectively.

5 Within the example network arrangement 18, it is preferable that links to databases are made using an interface such as a Java DataBase Connectivity (JDBC) interface. Alternatively, links to databases, as well as links to other network components, may be comprised of a variety of interfaces and protocols such as, for example: an Open DataBase Connectivity (ODBC) interface; a
10 Network File System (NFS) interface; Web NFS interface; a Server Message Block (SMB) interface; a Samba interface; a Netware Core Protocol (NCP) interface; a Distributed File System (DFS) interface, or Common Internet File System (CIFS) architecture, as well as use such transport protocols as, for example, a TCP/IP protocol, an IPX/SPX protocol, an HTTP protocol, and a
15 NetBEUI protocol.

Referring to Fig. 2, there is shown a flow chart illustrating the steps conducted in a method for storing and accessing agent identifying information and agent commission information in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. In step 54, the agent identifying information and the agent commission
20 information is received for analysis and storage. The agent identifying information and the agent commission information may be submitted via paper or electronic correspondence or may be submitted using other means such as telephonically. In accordance with a preferred embodiment, and with reference to FIG. 1, the agent identifying information and the agent commission information
25 may initially be entered into network terminal 7 and then transmitted via network link 42 to application server 20. In step 56, the received agent identifying information and the agent commission information is analyzed and sorted within the application server 20. Preferably, the analysis and storage of the agent
30 identifying information and the agent commission information may be accomplished through the use of a database program.

After being analyzed and sorted, the agent identifying information and the agent commission information, in step 58, are then saved within a selected database. In accordance with a preferred embodiment, and with reference to FIG. 1, the agent identifying information and the agent commission information are then preferably transmitted via a link 38 to the database server 22 where the information is stored. In step 60, the agent identifying information and the agent commission information are displayed. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the display of the agent identifying information and the agent commission information is preferably provided via web pages which are stored or "hosted" on the application sever 20.

In step 62, interactive access to a display of detailed agent commission information is provided. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the interactive access to the display of the detailed agent commission information is preferably provided via an embedded HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) link within the "hosted" or stored web pages displaying the agent identifying information and the agent commission information. In step 64, interactive access is further provided to a display of detailed agent identifying information. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the interactive access to the display of detailed agent identifying information is also preferably provided via an embedded HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) link within the "hosted" or stored web pages displaying the agent identifying information and the agent commission information.

With reference to FIG. 1, the agent identifying information and the agent commission information are preferably accessible by the remote terminals 24, 28 and 30. In a preferred embodiment, the web page functionality of the present invention is preferably provided using HTML links with Java Servlets to generate reports and presentations for users. Alternatively, any suitable programming or presentation language is within the scope of the present invention. For instance, the present invention may be written in other languages or formats such as Java, JavaScript, SGML, XML, or URML.

Referring now to FIG 3, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, an interactive display 69 in accordance with step 60 is shown. As shown, users accessing the agent identifying information and the agent commission information may first be greeted by a greeting screen 66. The
5 greeting screen 66 may incorporate a company logo, announcements, and other such information. Through the greeting screen 66, users may access the commissions report home page 70. As illustrated, it is preferable that users are provided access to the commission report home page 70 only after accepting the terms and condition of a legal disclaimer 68 or the like.

10 Once at commissions report home page 70, users may access all available agent identifying information and agent commission information by activating embedded links. Accordingly, users may activate the agent name link 78 to navigate to the agent contact information page 100. Similarly, users wishing to access more detailed information on a particular policy or account may activate
15 policy link 80 to navigate to the commission report detail page 98. Likewise, users may activate the client link 82 to navigate to the client description page 96 or the product link 84 to navigate to the product description page 94.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, additional functionality may be built into the commissions report home page 70.
20 For instance, as illustrated in FIG. 3, an estimated gross commission link 86 may be provided to navigate users to an explanatory page 92 which may provide a definition of gross commission data. Similarly, an estimated processing date link 88 may be provided to navigate users to an explanatory page 90 which may, for example, contain a current definition of the estimated processing date.

25 Additionally, a legal link 72 may be provided to navigate users to a copy of the legal disclaimers 68. Further, a link 74 may be provided to navigate users to pages or files containing information to frequently asked questions (FAQs) 76 or the like.

Referring now to FIGS. 4-5, an example commission report page 70 and an
30 example commission report detail page 98 are shown. With respect to each

example page, selected exemplary links and features are provided to assist the user in locating and analyzing information. On each page, a legal link 72 may be provided to navigate users to a copy of the legal disclaimer 68. Additionally, a contact button 106 may be provided to generate an e-mail message or the like for an administrator. In accordance with a preferred embodiment, each page may contain additional links and Graphical User Interface (GUI) icons and buttons to allow for specialized functionality within each page as desired. Further, for each selected field or link, "pop-up" boxes and "pull-down" menus may be provided to assist users in entering and identifying information correctly.

Referring now to FIG. 4, an example commissions report home page 70 is shown. As shown, exemplary links 78, 80, 82, 84, 86 and 88 may be provided as column headings to organize and present information. Accordingly, as discussed above with reference to FIG. 3, a user viewing the commissions report home page 70 may activate the agent name link 78 to navigate to an agent contact information page 100. Similarly, users wishing to access more detailed information on the definition or description of a particular column of information, may activate the appropriate link 80, 82, 84, 86, 88 to navigate to the appropriate definition or description 90, 92, 94, 96, or 98. Accordingly, users may activate policy/account link 80 to navigate to the commission report detail page 98. Likewise, users may activate the client link 82 to navigate to the client description page 96 or the product link 84 to navigate to the product description page 94. Similarly, users may activate estimated gross commission link 86 or estimated processing date link 88 to navigate to explanatory pages 92 and 90 respectively. Additionally, as shown, a sort button 108 is provided to allow users to arrange the order of the information provided. Further, a print button 110 is provided to allow users to print selected information.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention, specific links may be added, modified or removed altogether to allow for various implementations of the present invention. For instance, according to a specific

preferred embodiment, agent name link 78 and agent contact information page 100 may be removed entirely.

Referring now to FIG. 5, an example commission report detail page 98 is shown. As discussed above, users may gain access to commission report detail page 98 via the policy/account link 80. As shown, the commission report detail page 98 provides agent commission information including policy information 74 and commission detail information 75. As shown, the policy information 74 includes: a policy number field 74a; a client name field 74b; a product field 74c; a company field 74d; and an issue date field 74e. As further shown, the commission detail information 75 includes: an estimated commission processing date field 75a; a face amount of policy field 75b; a premium field 75c; a premium mode field 75d; an issue age field 75e; a split percentage field 75f; a commissionable amount field 75g; a commissionable rate field 75h; an estimated gross commission field 75i. and a reference number field 75j.

As is readily apparent from the above detailed description, the system and method of the present invention may be used in a variety of network configurations. The system and method of the invention are also highly flexible and can be easily modified and customized to fit specific situations. For instance, for each of the example web pages discussed, many different fields may be created and used to display pertinent agent information as desired. Further, individual data fields provided as illustrated in FIG. 4-5 may be deleted and removed altogether. Additionally, present invention may be used within network arrangements such as a local area network (LAN) including an Ethernet and a Token Ring access method, a metropolitan area network (MAN), and a wide area network (WAN). Further, although the preferred embodiments are discussed with reference to the Windows NT/NTM environment, the present invention may also be used in a variety of other server platforms and operating environments such as, for example, Windows 95, 98 and 2000, Unix, OS/2 and NetWare.

Additionally, the present invention may be used with a variety of networking links including those based upon, for example, a Network File System

(NFS); a Web NFS; a Server Message Block (SMB); a Samba; a Netware Core Protocol (NCP); a Distributed File System (DFS), and a Common Internet File System (CIFS) architecture, as well as use such transport protocols as, for example, TCP/IP, IPX/SPX, HTTP and NetBEUI.

5 The invention has been described with particular reference to preferred embodiments which are intended to be illustrative rather than restrictive. Alternative embodiments will become apparent to those skilled in the art to which this invention pertains without departing from its spirit and scope. Thus, such variations and modifications of the present invention can be effected within the
10 spirit and scope of the following claims.